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ABSTRACT

This study predicts that race is not related to global measures of self-esteem but that in the context of specific evaluative feedback, racial differences in self-evaluation will be observed. Forty black and 40 white college students were administered the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale and a series of memory tasks about which contrived feedback was given. As predicted, results indicate no significant differences between the races on global measures of self-esteem. Racial and sexual differences are found in post-experimental ratings of ability to memorize. Although there are no significant differences in actual performance, remarkable differences are noted in self-evaluation between those given negative and those given positive feedback. Differences are observed between blacks and whites, especially white men in their level of self-evaluation in the presence of external feedback. White men are less affected by negative feedback than blacks and white females. These differences support the existence of differential expectations and feedback on the part of social systems along racial and sexual lines. Results of the study have an important implication for subsequent research on self-esteem and race. It is important that the distinction be made between report of self-evaluation that occurs in a context of specific feedback and one which does not, because the choice of one procedure over the other may determine whether racial differences will be found. (Author/AM)

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External Feedback, Self-Evaluation and Performance of Black and White College Students

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Running Head: External Feedback, Self-Evaluation and Race

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Abstract

It is generally held that self-esteem varies across racial and ethnic groups with Whites possessing higher levels of self-esteem than Third-world groups. This difference is frequently attributed to differential feedback provided to Whites and to peoples of color. The existence of lower levels of self-esteem in Blacks is contested by Barnes (1973) who suggests that the Black family and community provide an adequate base for the development of self-esteem. The discrepancy in research findings might be accounted for by methodological variations related to context and measurement technique. It was predicted that race would not be related to global measures of self-esteem but in the context of specific evaluative feedback racial differences in self evaluation would be observed. Black and White college students were given the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale and a series of memory tasks about which contrived feedback was given. No differences were found on the Tennessee Self-Concept but differences were observed between Blacks and Whites, especially White men in their level of self-evaluation in the presence of external feedback. White men were less affected by negative feedback than Blacks and White females. These differences support the existence of differential expectations and feedback on the part of social systems along racial and sexual lines.

External Feedback, Self Evaluation and Performance of Black and White College Students

Attempts to delineate the adverse effect of racism social systems on the behavior of Blacks and other third-world peoples frequently focus on self-evaluation or self-esteem. Much of the thinking in this area is influenced by the early work of Clark and Clark (1939) which suggests that real differences exist between Blacks and Whites in self-acceptance and self-esteem as a consequence of the differential value ascribed to them by dominant social systems. In response to this negative feedback, Blacks tend to develop a less adequate level of self-esteem than Whites. Increasingly, questions are being raised about the validity of analyses which suggest that Blacks or other oppressed peoples have comparatively low self-esteem (Christmas, 1973; Baughman, 1971; Barnes, 1973). Critics point out the use of inappropriate paradigms and other methodological shortcomings which limit the validity of such findings. Clarification of this question might be achieved by first defining self-esteem and examining its importance for understanding human behavior. It should also be helpful to review available research on racial differences in self-esteem.

Definition of Self-Esteem

The term self-esteem has been used interchangeably with self-concept and other constructs as self-evaluation and self-regard. Research on self-concept has been faulted because of the ambiguity and lack of agreement about meaning that results in the inability to generalize from one study to another. These limitations stem largely from the use of these constructs in a literary common-sense manner independent of a supporting theoretical framework

(Christmas, 1973). Additional criticism of self-concept derives from its all-encompassing, non-specific approach to describing self-perceptions. It has been suggested that such global terms be abandoned in favor of more focal and well-defined constructs. For example, in the place of self-concept, the term self-esteem should be used when referring specifically to self-evaluative statements, positive or negative, or the term identity when specifically referring to racial, religious, or political group with which one established primary affiliation. In this manner, one is able to denote clearly the meaning of the construct under consideration. This distinction is important in that the constructs esteem and identity though related to each other affect the individual's functioning in somewhat different ways. For example, an individual's identity might be expected to have pronounced implications for his political tendencies or attitudes, but may have no relationship to achievement. On the other hand, self-esteem might play an important role in sustaining efforts which lead to achievement, but may not be related to political attitudes. For the purposes of this report the construct self-esteem will be used.

Self-esteem is defined as a pattern of judgments, precepts, or evaluations developed while observing self as an object interacting with others and completing one's life-tasks. Rogers (1951) suggests that for each person there exists an "organized configuration of perceptions" about personal attributes and the value assigned to these characteristics. When we talk about self-esteem we generally refer to how a person feels about himself, the judgment he makes about his abilities, performance and personal attributes, the extent to which he makes negative or positive self-referent statements.

Self-esteem is not generally viewed as a static or fixed trait so much as a synthesis of impressions evolving over time through the incorporation of additional information. In addition to changes over times the level of self-esteem also varies from one aspect of self to another in that one may form widely divergent levels of self-evaluation, for example, of one's physical appearance, athletic prowess and academic ability. Even within the same attribute, self-esteem is subject to influence by changes in the immediate environment. Baughman (1971) for example points out that Black school children may have satisfactory levels of self-esteem with regard to academic ability in settings which are predominantly Black but when placed in recently desegregated schools they evidence a more depressed level of self-esteem.

Importance of Self-Esteem

In spite of the apparent variability of self-esteem, this concept provides a useful framework for understanding how self-perceptions affect behavior. Self-esteem has a relatively consistent relationship with behaviors important for high levels of performance and personal effectiveness. Academic achievement, appropriate assertiveness, participation in civil rights demonstrations, and psychosocial competence are all highly correlated with self-esteem.

Chirstmas (1973) reviews several studies which demonstrate that children with higher levels of self-esteem experience significantly greater academic attainment than children with lower levels of self-esteem. The findings hold true for both Black and White children. Moreover, a number of recent studies suggest that a clear relationship exists between self-esteem and psychosocial

effectiveness. Tyler (1975) using an instrument developed to measure individual psychosocial competence found that indigenous community workers and high school students scoring high on the competence scale tended to have a moderately high level of self-esteem. This finding was replicated with a sample of Black adolescents in Upward Bound by Young (1975) who found that high-competence students attained significantly higher total scores on the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale than low-competence students.

In support of this thesis, Crain & Weisman (1972) point out that self-esteem is associated with assertiveness, a "tendency to manipulate the environment to one's own advantage . . . to seek self-improvement . . . and to actively take steps to assure one's own well being." In this study of northern Blacks the results strongly pointed to the conclusion that persons high in self-esteem are more likely to attain higher levels of academic achievement, career success and to engage in active utilization of resources available to them than are a similar group of low self-esteem subjects.

A high level of self-esteem seems on the one hand, related to achievement and an enhancement of life satisfaction while on the other hand, a low level of self-esteem is related to clinical depression, anxiety, global feelings of inadequacy and a paucity of environmental reinforcement (Beck, 1968). In summary, self-esteem is an important component of effective coping behavior. On that basis it is an important barometer through which it is possible to gauge an individual's adaptive response to his environment.

Self-Esteem: Symbolic-Self-Reinforcement

While much attention has been devoted to understanding the relation that exists between self-esteem and other important behaviors relatively little

attention is devoted to understanding how self-esteem exercises influence over these behaviors. It is not clear, for example, what role self-esteem plays in the process by which academic or assertive behavior is developed, strengthened and maintained. The evidence presented above suggests that high levels of self-esteem facilitate or enhance performance while low levels of self-esteem mediate inadequate performance and substandard achievement. Current research on self-control and symbolic processes may provide a theoretical basis for understanding the function of self-esteem (Thoresen & Mahoney, 1974; Mahoney, 1974). This line of research suggests two relevant points. First, it has been well documented that external reinforcement is capable of controlling behaviors and that the efficacy of a reinforcer does not diminish when it is self-applied as opposed to externally-applied (Bandura, 1969). Thus, it is possible for an individual to exercise effective control over his behavior through the use of self-imposed contingencies. Secondly, external behavior and reinforcement processes are continuous with internal or symbolic behaviors or processes in that both can be subject to consequences and act as reinforcing stimuli. Barbarin (Note 1) provides a theoretical rationale for self-esteem as a form of symbolic self-reinforcement. Self-esteem is operationally defined as the ratio of positively self-reinforcing statements to self punishing statements made by an individual in evaluating himself. Self-esteem then may be viewed as a symbolic self-reinforcement process by which an individual makes self-evaluative statements regarding behavior. When the balance of these statements is positive the individual is described as possessing a high level of self-esteem. This high level of positive symbolic

reinforcement like external reinforcement tends to increase or enhance performance. Conversely when an individual makes primarily negative evaluations of himself or his behavior he is described as having low self-esteem. As in other cases of self-applied punishment the result is a decrease in behavior or performance levels. And so it is suggested here that a model for understanding how self-esteem relates to other behaviors is essentially a symbolic reinforcement process.

External Evaluation and Self-Esteem

Self-esteem does not develop or exist within a vacuum but is influenced by input from significant or powerful others as well as the larger social systems which impinge on one's life. Therefore, any differences found between Blacks and Whites in self-esteem may be attributed in part to the specific external feedback each receives. A person tends to view himself in much the same way as the external environment views him. If others see one as competent and good, one will have a high estimation of himself and his activities. Conversely, when an individual is constantly bombarded with the message that he is inferior, incompetent and of little value, he tends to hold himself in low esteem. Self evaluation, then might be said to be a function of external evaluation.

Black Self-Esteem

If Blacks receive uniformly negative feedback about themselves from the larger social systems such as: education, law enforcement, government and business; if they are told that they are "high risk," low achievers, an unwanted burden and, therefore, of little value to society, then the inescapable consequence of this feedback is an attenuation of self-esteem.

It has been suggested that the negative feedback resulting from racism and cultural oppression invariably lowers self-esteem in Blacks. (Poussaint & Atkinson, 1972; Kvaraceus, Gibson, Patterson, Seasholes & Grambs, 1965; Clark & Clark, 1974.) To the extent that one receives negative feedback, there develops a negative expectancy about one's ability and value. Banks and Grambs (1972) and Clark and Clark (1947) conclude that Blacks are caught up in a cycle of self-rejection, self-hatred, and self-destruction resulting from patterns of racial discrimination which relegate them to the lowest socio-economic levels and denies them access to rewards available in this society. This self-hatred and self-rejection leads to a marked decrease in self-esteem. Hauser (1970) arrives at a similar conclusion in a study of self-esteem in Black adolescents. Moreover Williams and Byars (1970) using the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale with adolescents in southern desegregated schools found that on twelve of seventeen scales Blacks scored lower than Whites. However only the three related to moral, personal and social self were significant. Crain and Weisman (1972) administered a survey to northern Black and White adults in which all subjects were asked to rate themselves as above-average, average, or below average on their performance in their roles as parents, and children. In addition they were asked to rate themselves on the following traits: intelligence, athletic skills, mechanical skills, trustworthiness, and willingness to work hard. Blacks rated themselves below average significantly more than Whites. The greatest differences however were in the ratings of trustworthiness, willingness to work hard and intelligence. The authors concluded that Blacks were significantly lower in self-esteem than Whites.

Gibby and Gabler (1967) reported differences in self-esteem between a matched group of Black and White sixth graders. Participants were asked to estimate how intelligent they considered themselves to be and how intelligent their parents and friends considered them to be. In addition subjects were asked to rate themselves as they would like to be. Although no significant differences were found on global ratings, Black subjects showed greater discrepancies between their real and ideal selves than White subjects. Most often these differences are attributed to poverty, discrimination, and system feedback in general. Proshansky and Newton (1973) exemplify the typical thinking about this issue in the following manner:

> We see the system as imposing a double burden on the Negro through severe social and economic inequality and through the heavy psychological consequences suffered by the Negro who has first played an inferior role. There are obvious differences in schools, housing, employment and [illegible] less visible, but equally serious, are the heavy [illegible]-logical costs of low self-esteem, feelings of helplessness, and basic identity conflicts. . . . In learning that he is Black 'dark', 'colored', or 'Negro' the Negro child soon, if not simultaneously, learns the negative value, connotation based on membership in his racial group. He learns that it is bad to be Negro, because he is not white.

Not all of the research on Black self-esteem has been consistent with this hypothesis. On the contrary, several studies have failed to find any

differences between Blacks and Whites on measures of self-concept and self-esteem (Powell, 1973). Carpenter and Dusst (1969) asked first and fifth grade boys and girls to rate themselves on the following adjectives: smart, happy, attractive, strong, obedient, and well liked. Although Black first grade girls had more positive self-esteem than White girls, however, there were no overall differences between Blacks and Whites. Similarly, Guggenheim (1969) failed to find differences between Blacks and Whites or a relationship between level of esteem and prediction of success on academic tasks among elementary school age children. The assumption that race is an important variable in predicting self-esteem was challenged.

Recently, several investigators have seriously questioned the validity of earlier research which supports the notion of negative Black self-esteem (Arnez, 1972; Barnes, 1973; Baughman, 1971). Baughman has suggested that a reappraisal of the research on self-esteem among Blacks is in order especially in light of the sweeping changes politically and culturally, in the 60's and 70's, among Blacks in America. Both Baughman (1971) and Barnes (1973) have suggested that much of the previous research has been misleading because White-dominated systems have been viewed as the major element affecting the self-esteem of Blacks. The logic of this approach is not clear especially when considering the fact that it is not uncommon for Blacks to spend much of their time in predominantly Black settings. White society does not provide the only context for the development of self-esteem among Blacks; on the contrary, the Black community and in particular the Black family play a vital role. Within this context, the Black child is nurtured and allowed to develop, realizing his own worth as a person and testing out his adequacy first

as a member of his family and then as a contributing member of the Black community which may provide a basis for the development of high self-esteem in Blacks. Arnez (1972) cites several studies which support the notion of a positive self-evaluation on the part of Blacks. (Larson, Olson, Totdah, & Jensen, 1966; Georgeoff, 1969; Hodgkins & Stakanas, 1969.) These studies using a racial identification task, a semantic differential rating and the Piers-Harris measure of self-concept respectively found no evidence to support the contention that Black children misidentify themselves more frequently than Whites, or rate themselves in a more derogatory manner than Whites. Rosenberg and Simmons (1971) review a series of twelve studies on self-esteem of Black and White southern school children conducted between 1963 and 1970. In eight of the twelve studies reviewed, Black subjects demonstrated significantly higher levels of self-esteem than White subjects.

Studies on the relationship between race and self-esteem do not yield a clear or definitive answer to the question of differences. Any orderly relationship that might exist is obscured by the methodological variations and problems present in the design of many of the studies investigating this issue. These difficulties include lack of consensually defined construct, use of scales of unproven validity and inappropriate statistical analyses (Cnristmas, 1973). Given these limitations it is difficult to marshall a convincing case in support of unconditional racial differences in self-esteem. The argument forwarded by Baughman (1972) and Barnes (1973) that the Black family provides a sufficient basis for the development of adequate levels of self-esteem is convincing. Although there may be potent systems forces which tend to attenuate

self-esteem of Blacks and Third-World peoples, there may also be factors such as family and community which may enhance self-esteem. The picture of self-esteem is a complex one in that there are multiple determinants acting simultaneously and affecting self-esteem in both a positive and negative direction. Consequently, in studies of self-esteem it is important to consider these multiple sources of influence in making predictions. Since both Blacks and Whites have equal probability of receiving positive and negative feedback from family and community, there is little grounds here on which to predict racial differences in self-esteem. This may not be true in the case of system level feedback.

In light of this, two distinct methodological approaches may be taken in the study of race and self-esteem, each accompanied by different predictions. The first is a global self-rating using a trait or descriptive sentence, independent of any external evaluation. This is exemplified by the use of such instruments as the Semantic Differential Adjective Checklist and the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale. Generally this approach has produced only minor differences along racial lines. A second is an analogue approach which involves the provision of feedback about performance and measurement of self-evaluation as affected by the feedback. In this paradigm, differences are expected between Blacks and Whites. The reasons for this differential prediction are complex. In spite of the fact that the family and local community may provide an atmosphere in which a positive self-esteem may develop, Blacks are also involved in larger systems such as education and employment in which they encounter feedback which is frequently negative. And so, Blacks develop negative expectancies concerning the possibility of receiving positive

feedback and consequently of succeeding in such environments. In these situations self-evaluation is not a precise measure of how the person feels generally about himself so much as his realistic appraisal of the probability of success in that setting. Blacks and Whites have markedly different histories of feedback from such systems as education. On that basis they should react differently to positive and negative feedback in similar situations. This difference is expected because the impact of external feedback on self-evaluation is greater when it is consistent with previous feedback than when feedback is inconsistent (Schrauger & Lund, 1975).

Evaluative feedback consistent with previous feedback is generally accorded greater credibility, attributed to self as opposed to external causes, and undergoes less distortion than feedback which is at variance with previous feedback. And as a result, it is "more accurately retained and more easily retrieved than incongruent feedback." Similarly when the evaluative outcome of a particular behavior is consistent with one's expectancy or belief, it is less likely to be attributed to external causes. To be specific, Shrauger (1975) points out that subjects with a history of high self-evaluations when given positive external evaluation tend to increase the level of their self-evaluation and conversely subjects with a history of low evaluations when given negative external feedback tend to decrease the level of their self-evaluations. Subjects given feedback inconsistent with their expectancy or level of self-esteem show relatively little change at all.

Performance

The impact of external evaluation is not limited to self-evaluation Shrauger (1975) reviews a series of studies which examine the effect of external evaluation on performance of high and low self-esteem subjects as well.

In the Schalon (1968) study, subjects were given either negative or no external evaluation. Performance of low self-esteem subjects was detrimentally affected by negative external evaluation as compared to control groups. In subsequent studies, high self-esteem subjects when given negative evaluations showed similar decrements in performance. It should be noted that the performance of low self-esteem subjects is more adversely affected by external evaluation than the performance of high esteem subjects, especially when the evaluation is negative. On the other hand, when external evaluation is positive, high self-esteem subjects appear to increase their performance more than the low group. In summary, self-evaluation and performance tend to change in response to external evaluations especially when those external evaluations are consistent with expectancies. When they are inconsistent, minimal change results.

Problem

Available research comparing Blacks and Whites on self-esteem presents a conflicting picture. Some studies find marked differences in self-esteem with Blacks generally scoring lower. Other studies fail to support these findings. It seems reasonable to suggest that part of the discrepancy in the findings might result from differences in the research strategies employed. Some studies use as a measure of self-esteem, the individual's global appraisal of his physical, social, moral and cultural identity. Other researchers are concerned with self-evaluation of functioning in areas such as intelligence and achievement, about which the individual has had a long history of specific feedback.

Since family-community feedback may be sufficient to foster positive feelings about self, in general, there appears to be little basis for predicting differences between Blacks and Whites on global self-evaluation. On the other hand, since racism in our society has not abated, Blacks and Whites tend to receive differential feedback about their performance and worth, and as a result may process external evaluation in a different manner.

It is expected that negligible difference will be found between Blacks and Whites on global ratings of physical attributes, social skills, family relationships, other personal attributes measured by a self-esteem instrument. On the other hand, there should be differences in self-evaluation made in the context of external evaluation. Whites should alter self-evaluation to a greater extent than Blacks under positive feedback and conversely, Blacks should alter their level of self-evaluation more in response to negative evaluation than Whites. Differences between Blacks and Whites are also predicted for the manner in which external evaluation is processed, i.e., emotional impact, the extent to which subjects attribute performance to ability or external factors and their evaluation of the source of feedback. It is also expected that performance will be affected by feedback in that negative feedback will result in a decrease in the level of performance and positive feedback will result in an increase.

Method

Subjects

The sample consisted of forty (40) Black and forty (40) White volunteer college students, half male and half female, from several large predominantly

White urban universities in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. All students were enrolled in undergraduate psychology courses and received additional course credit for participation in this study. They averaged 19 years of age, three semesters in college, and had an overall grade point average of B-.

Experimenters

Experimenters were two advanced male psychology majors with experience in conducting research, one Black and one White. Half of each cell was seen by the White experimenter and half by the Black experimenter. Both conducted parts of the procedure involving administration of individual tests. In addition to the two male experimenters, there were three female experimenters who administered group tests, collected information about reaction to male experimenters, paid and debriefed subjects.

Procedure

Subjects were brought into a group room where they were asked to fill out the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale, and a questionnaire on which they provided demographic data as well as a rating of their ability to memorize on a scale from 1 to 10. After completing these questionnaires, subjects were randomly assigned to experimental groups. A stratified random sampling procedure was used to assign equal numbers of both sexes and races to each of the two experimental conditions and each of the two male experimenters.

Experimenters saw each subject individually, talking to them informally and explaining the purpose of the experiment. Subjects were led to believe that the experiment was an attempt to develop and validate new culture-fair

items for an IQ test and that these items consisted primarily of memory tasks. Subjects were instructed in the following manner: "The items you are about to be given vary from very difficult to very easy. Although no one is expected to get all of them correct, you should try to do as well as you possibly can. After you complete each memory task, you will be asked to evaluate how well you think you did on that particular item. You should estimate in what percentile you think your performance falls for that item. In doing so you are asked to compare yourself to your friends and other people you know at school. For example, if you think that you did extremely well on an item, better than most of your friends, you might estimate that you fall in the 90th percentile. Or if you feel that you did poorly, worse than most of your friends, you might estimate that you fall in the 30th, 20th, or 10th percentile." Subjects were told that they would be paid on the basis of their overall performance. In order to suppress grossly inflated or deflated estimations, subjects were also told that half of the money earned would be forfeited if their estimated percentile deviated more than twenty points from their true score.

Memory Tasks

All subjects were administered three blocks of trials each consisting of five (5) memory items. Three of the items were drawn directly from the Wechsler Memory Scale, viz., Logical Memory, Word Association, and Digit Span. In the fourth item subjects were required to look at a picture and after five seconds, recall as many of the objects as they could remember. In the fifth item subjects were given an alphabet and asked to name as many words as they

could in one minute. The letters E, F and G were used. In the first block of five (5) trials (Baseline) subjects were given the memory items and asked to estimate their performance after each item, but were not given any feedback. During the second block of five trials (Feedback) subjects were given the item, given positive or negative feedback, and then asked to evaluate their performance. In the third block of trials (Post-Feedback) the procedure was the same as in the Baseline trials.

Feedback

Those subjects assigned to the positive feedback group were given both verbal and non-verbal cues indicating that they were doing well. While responding on the items in the feedback block, the experimenter would smile, nod his head vigorously, and say things as "good." In addition, the experimenter would make such spontaneous remarks as "Gee, that's really good," "I'm surprised at how well you are doing," "That's better than most people have done on this," and "That's the best performance I've had all day." Subjects in the negative evaluation group were also given verbal and non-verbal cues about their performances. As the subject began to respond, the experimenter would shake his head, shrug, and frown. In addition, the experimenter would make such remarks as "can you think of anything else"?, "Is that all"?, "That's not too good," "Most people are able to do much better than that," "You must be very nervous, people don't do well when they are nervous." Even in the negative group the experimenter attempted to maintain a positive relationship with the subject and would say things like "don't get discouraged," "you can do it," and "try harder on the next one."

Termination Questionnaire

After all of the memory items were completed subjects were taken back to the group room by the experimenter and asked by a different assistant to fill out a termination questionnaire. On this form subjects were asked to estimate again on a ten-point scale, the quality of their memory, as well as to estimate how much money they think they should be paid on the basis of their performance. In order to test for the effectiveness of the manipulation, subjects were asked to tell what they thought the purpose of the experiment was, to rate the extent to which their performance was representative of their ability, and to what they attributed the quality of their performance on memory items. In addition, subjects were asked to rate the emotional affect of the experiment on themselves. Subjects were also asked to rate the male experimenter on the following qualities: truthfulness and honesty, as well as traits which related to how well they liked him and how fair he was as a person. Once subjects completed the termination questionnaire, they were paid the amount of money they felt they earned and then debriefed.

Results

Global Self-Esteem

The Tennessee Self-Concept Scale (TSCS) yields a total score in addition to nine sub-scale scores. The raw scores for each of these scales were transformed to standard scores which were then used for statistical analyses. A three-way factorial analysis of variance was performed with Race, Sex and Feedback as factors for this and all subsequent analyses. The mean sub-scores for all the groups fall below the mean for the population on which this

instrument was originally standardized. The mean total score for all subjects was 41.9. Black females attained the highest total score (Mean = 45.3) followed by White males (Mean = 43.5), Black males (Mean = 41.6) and White females (Mean = 34.3). This same pattern held for all of the sub-scores as well (See Table 1).

Insert Table 1 here

Table 2 presents the ANOVA for the total self-concept scores.

Insert Table 2 here

There were no significant main effects on race, sex, feedback or their interactions. As expected, Whites did not differ from Blacks on self-esteem when global measures are used.

Ratings of Ability to Memorize

Subjects were asked to rate their ability to memorize on a scale from 1 to 10 before the experimental manipulation. These ratings are surprisingly high for all groups (see Table 3). No significant differences were found on

Insert Table 3 here

pre-experimental ratings between Blacks and Whites, males and females or their interactions. In support of the random assignment no differences were found between those groups assigned to positive and negative feedback conditions prior to experimental manipulation.

Performance Estimation

Table 4 presents the mean performance estimates for each of the eight cells in the design across the Baseline, Feedback and Post-Feedback Trials.

Insert Table 4 here

No significant differences were found among the groups although it is worth noting that males tended to make slightly higher estimates than females.

An entirely different pattern emerges once the feedback is introduced into the process of self-evaluation. A factorial analysis of co-variance was performed using race, sex and feedback as factors and baseline estimates as the co-variate. The experimental feedback manipulation proved to be successful in that subjects in the positive feedback condition made significantly higher estimations of performance than did subjects in the negative feedback condition, $F(1,69)=23.8$, $p < .001$. No overall differences were found on the basis of race and sex. When given positive feedback males and females made similar ratings, but when given negative feedback, males, especially White males, made significantly higher estimates of performance than did females, $F(1,69)=3.95$, $p < .05$. While Black males and Black females made relatively similar ratings, White males made significantly higher estimates of performance than White females under both positive and negative conditions, $F(1,69)=4.09$, $p < .05$.

Insert Figure 1 here

Similar effects were noted in the performance estimations on the post-feedback trials. The post-experimental ratings of ability to memorize provided the most critical evidence regarding the differential effect of feedback and race on self-evaluation. Positive and negative feedback had the expected affect on almost all groups in that those receiving positive feedback increased their ratings of ability from pre to post-test and those receiving negative feedback decreased. Under the positive feedback, White males made the highest self-rating of ability (7.5) and white females made the lowest rating (5.6). Black females made slightly higher ratings than Black males (7.3 vs 6.9). Even under negative feedback, white males made the highest rating of ability (5.7). This represents only a slight decline from their pre-experimental rating of 6.1. Black males exhibited the greatest decrement in self-rating, declining from a 6.3 on the pre-experimental rating to a 3.4 on the post-experimental rating. Black females were moderately affected by the negative feedback (6.0 at pre and 5.4 post-experimental). White women were similarly affected by the negative feedback in declining from 6.2 to 5.0 ratings.

Table 3 presents a comparison of pre-experimental and post-experimental ratings of ability to memorize. A factorial analysis of co-variance was performed on the post-experimental ratings using the pre-experimental ratings as co-variate.

Insert Figure 2 about here

Although there was a significant main effect on feedback with the positive group making much higher ratings than the negative group, $F(1,69)=27.25$,

$p < .001$, there were no significant main effects on either race or sex. As predicted there was a highly significant race by feedback interaction, $F(1,69)=11.39$, $p < .001$. Under the positive condition there was little difference between Black and White subjects. However, in the negative condition, Blacks exhibited significantly more depressed ratings in response to external feedback than did White subjects. The changes from pre-experimental to post-experimental ratings suggest that the impact of negative evaluation is much greater for Blacks than Whites. $F(1,69)=4.14$, $p < .003$.

It should be noted, however, that the effect of feedback on race is not uniform across sex. There was a highly significant Race X Sex interaction, $F(1,69)=11.39$, $p < .001$. The effect of feedback on males and females varied with race. White males and Black females tended to make higher ratings than Black males and White females across both feedback conditions. In addition, there was a significant Sex X Feedback interaction, $F(1,69)=4.11$, $p < .05$. Under the positive condition the males made much higher ratings than the females. This difference is primarily accounted for by the relatively higher rating made by White males.

Performance

Raw performance scores were transformed to standard scores and then reduced to percentiles. A mean was calculated using the five percentile scores comprising each block of trials. These mean scores were used for the analyses. A 2 x 2 x 2 factorial analysis of the variance was performed on the performance levels for each of the three blocks of trials. On the feedback and post-feedback trials, an analysis of co-variance was performed using the baseline

performance as a co-variate. No significant main effects or interactions were found on the baseline and feedback trials. However, there was a significant Race X Sex X Feedback interaction on the post-feedback performance. White females in the negative feedback condition performed at a significantly higher rate than did White males in the negative feedback, $F(1,69)=9.51$,

Insert Figure 3 about here

$p < .003$. This is surprising in view of the fact that White males in the negative condition made higher self-evaluations of performance than any other group.

Using 11 pairs of polar adjectives, subjects were asked to rate the evaluator. There was a significant difference between Blacks and Whites on several ratings. These polar ratings were facile-clumsy, strong-weak, fair-unfair. Generally, Blacks tended to rate the evaluator in a more positive manner than White subjects. (Facile - $F(1,71)=5.48$, $p < .002$, Strong - $F(1,71)=7.46$, $p < .008$, Fair - $F(1,71)=4.28$, $p < .042$) On Truthful, Sincere, and Honest, Blacks tended to rate the evaluator more positively than Whites did. However, the trend on these ratings did not attain significance.

Subjects were asked to rate whether or not performances were representative of their ability. Though there were no differences between racial groups and sex, differences were found between the positive and negative feedback groups, with the positive group rating their performance significantly more representative of their ability than the negative feedback group, $F(1,69)=17.65$, $p < .001$. Not surprisingly, when feedback given was

positive, White men rated their performance as more strongly representative of their ability than any other group and of all the groups, Black men considered their performance least representative of their ability. Conversely, when the feedback was negative, White men took the opposite position and rated their performance as less representative of ability than any group. When subjects were asked to rate the extent to which they attributed their performance to their own ability or internal factors as opposed to extrinsic or situational variables, both Blacks and Whites, males and females responded similarly. The only differences found were those between the feedback groups. The negative feedback groups attributed their performance significantly more to external factors than to their own ability, $F(1,69)=14.85$, $p < .001$. Finally, on ratings of emotional reaction to the experimental situation, subjects receiving positive feedback predictably rated their emotional reaction as being more positive, $F(1,69)=5.79$, $p < .02$. It is especially noteworthy that on ratings of affective reactions to the feedback from negative to positive, Black males in the negative condition made a significantly more negative rating of emotional reactions than any other group, $F(1,69)=4.92$, $p < .03$. (See Figure 4.)

Insert Tables 5-8

Insert Figures 4, 5 and 6

Discussion

As predicted there were no significant differences between Blacks and Whites on global measures of self-esteem. These findings replicate those reported by Powell (1973) using the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale (TSCS) with a

similar group of Black and White Adolescents. Since the TSCS assesses global self evaluation and self satisfaction it seems plausible to interpret these findings as consistent with the position of Baughman (1971) and Barnes (1973) that the Black family and Community can provide the base on which an adequate sense of self is founded.

Unlike the general measure of self esteem, racial and sexual differences were found in post-experimental ratings of ability to memorize. Although there were no significant differences in actual performance, remarkable differences were found in self-evaluation between those given negative and those given positive feedback. However, the effects of this feedback were not uniform across all groups. In the positive condition, white males and black females made the most substantial increases in performance estimates, white females decreased somewhat while the Black male subjects remained relatively stable from pre- to post-rating. On the other hand, in the negative feedback condition, the white males responded relatively little to feedback and maintained a very high rating of their performance in spite of the feedback. The self-evaluation of Black males seems to have experienced the most debilitating effect under the negative feedback. On the post experimental rating, Black males dropped nearly 50% of pre-experimental rating. The White female also dropped considerably from pre to post. The Black female showed a decrement in rating of memory but this decline was not of the same magnitude. Scanzoni (1971) suggests that Black women pose less of a threat and as a result are treated more favorably by Whites than Black men. The difference in the response of Black men and Black women to external feedback may be related to the differences in status and accepta-

bility with which they have been historically viewed by white society. A Consistency interpretation of these results suggests that Black men changed the level of self-evaluation more in response to the negative feedback than positive feedback because the former is congruent with the quality of feedback generally accorded to them. White men on the other hand occupying a relatively privileged position in society were impervious to negative feedback. It is likely that such feedback is assigned little credibility by white men because it is not consistent with the quality of feedback expected. One might deduce that white men generally expect to be superior achievers. Given the expectation of superiority, it is not surprising that in spite of the fact that the performance level of white men falls below that of every other group under both positive and negative feedback conditions, white men make higher ratings of ability than any other group. Consequently, the self perception of white males is in accord with societal expectancies but relatively independent of actual performance. Thus, the second hypothesis is partially supported in that Blacks and Whites tend to respond differently in the face of similar feedback. White men alter their self-evaluation more in response to positive feedback than negative feedback. The converse is true for Black men.

Changes in performance were predicted to occur in response to external feedback. This hypothesis was not supported. Only minor changes occurred in performance levels across experimental trials. However, subjects in the positive feedback did show slight increments in performance levels while those in the negative feedback condition exhibited slight decrements in

performance. These modest trends held for Blacks as well as Whites, both male and female. These trends suggest that self-evaluation may in fact act as a symbolic reinforcer with a somewhat weak effect on behavior.

Reaction to feedback includes a wide range of cognitive and affective responses among which are emotionality, attributions of the causes of one's behavior, and feelings about the evaluator. In addition to experiencing the greatest decrement in pre-post ratings of ability to memorize, Black men in the negative condition felt worse about the experience than any other group. This negative emotionality may represent a heightened sensibility to failure, especially if it is perceived as beyond one's personal control.

Although Blacks in the negative conditions experience more intense levels of negative emotion toward the feedback than any other group, this emotionality was not channeled into negative feelings toward the Evaluators (Experimenter). Blacks in the negative condition tended to rate the experimenters much more positively than white subjects. In many cases, Blacks in the negative groups were more favorable than whites in the positive groups. This tentatively suggests that Blacks tend not to personalize the negative feedback but to ascribe it to the realities or requirements of a racist situation.

Blacks also tend to attribute the cause of their performance more to external, transient or accidental factors than to their ability or lack of it. The pattern adopted by Whites, especially white men in processing feedback is to react with little emotionality, to view behavior followed

by positive evaluation as representative of one's typical performance and attributable to one's ability but to view performance followed by negative feedback as atypical and attributable to external sources. White men are internal when the outcome is positive and relatively external when the outcome is negative. On the other hand, Blacks, especially Black men, are relatively external whether the outcome is positive or negative.

Thus two different patterns have been developed by Blacks and Whites to deal with the relatively different situations presented to them by the environment. Both are coping strategies which attempt to maximize their sense of adequacy and their ability to function given the limitations imposed and the differential reinforcements provided by society.

Recently, a great deal of interest has been generated around ways to increase internality with the goal of developing strategies for enhancing an individual's ability to problem solve and consequently become more self-directed. The above research suggests that the externality may be an adaptive coping strategy which allows Black men to confront their lack of control over the resources available in this society and to endure apparent failure without a total diminution of their sense of self as adequate and competent persons. For Blacks to be competent and in touch with reality, it may be useful for them to remain moderately external. Since there is in fact a differential distribution of power, wealth and social approval not based strictly on merit or performance, external attributions may be a realistic and helpful process for maintaining a sense of balance and an adequate level of self-esteem.

The experimental finding relating to differential reactions to negative feedback at some level supports the differences in expectations conveyed to Blacks and Whites. Blacks, especially Black men, are expected to fail. Whites, especially White men, are expected to succeed. While the expectations conveyed by systems feedback is not the primary factor in determining overall self-esteem it is an important determinant of the personal comfort experienced while functioning in that system. Even in an experimental setting where Blacks and Whites were given the same feedback they reacted differently.

In most situations in which individuals are confronted with negative information about their own performance, responses occur which protect one's personal sense of worth. The data suggest that Blacks and Whites utilize somewhat different patterns in responding. Whites tend to react by discounting the negative feedback and to displace their feelings onto the evaluator. On the other hand, Blacks, especially women, tend to accept the evaluation, feel positively toward the evaluator but attribute performance to factors external to self and to one's ability. If Whites as a group are not accustomed to receiving "blanket" negative feedback it is understandable that they would challenge the feedback rather than doubt their own ability. Similarly, it is not unreasonable to assume that Blacks given a history of negative feedback from a number of social systems do not expect positive feedback and readily designate external factors like racial prejudice as the cause of the feedback. This may, in part, be a correct assessment of the situation.

A curious, but unanticipated, pattern of results was obtained in the

case of the White female subjects. When given positive feedback, a slight decrease in rating of ability was noted. Under negative feedback, white females responded in a manner similar to that noted with Blacks, i.e. a precipitous decrease in the rating of ability. While the results obtained under the positive condition might be dismissed as spurious, the trend noted in the negative feedback condition is consistent with information collected on representativeness of performance, attributions, and emotional reactions to the feedback. The white female exhibited a pattern of responses different than that of white men. This finding suggests that the benefits that may accrue to whites as a product of the imbalance of a racist system is not extended equally to white women. That is to say the positive feedback available to white men regarding their behavior and their general value to society and acting as a buffer for white men against the internalization of negative feedback, does not function equally well for white women. The reason for this may be the very real differences in role and value ascribed to women by our society. It is highly likely that women in many ways have also been affected by the differential treatment and expectations.

The results of the study has an important implication for subsequent research on self-esteem and race. The simultaneous absence of racial differences on global measures of self evaluation and presence of marked differences in self-evaluation in response to feedback raises an important point with regard to the nature of self-esteem and research paradigms used to study it. It is important that the distinction be made between report of self-evaluation that occurs in a context of specific feedback and one

which does not. Choice of one procedure over the other may determine whether racial differences will be found.

Second, self-esteem is not undimensional. If generalization is desired across the entire domain of self esteem, the investigation must of necessity tap into more than one of the aspects of an individual's functioning. In many cases these dimensions may be independent of one another. This is especially true in situations where research uses as measure of self-esteem a single dimension and when that dimension, for example, academic behavior, has been subjected to a long history of negative or positive external feedback. It would be clearly misleading to infer that an individual's self-evaluation is characterized by the level of self-evaluation on that single dimension. As a rule, it makes sense to talk about a specific area of self-evaluation rather than risk the danger of distortion in generalizing too readily on the basis of limited data.

In summary, on the basis of these data, there appears to be little basis for ascribing to racial differences in global self-esteem. On the other hand, Blacks and Whites do respond differently in the presence of negative external feedback. It is suggested that these differences between Blacks and Whites in self-evaluation is attributable to differential expectation and feedback provided to Blacks and Whites by the larger social systems.

Notes

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2. Requests for reprints should be sent to Oscar Barbarin, c/o Community Field Station, Department of Psychology, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland 20742.

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Table 1

Mean Standard Scores on the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale

for Black & White Subjects

Variable	Black		White	
Total Scale	Male	Female	Male	Female
Self Criticism	44.150	44.850	40.050	45
	S.D.= 8.035	S.D.=14.379	S.D.=14.409	6.609
Self Concept	41.650	45.3	43.55	37.35
	S.D.=15.104	S.D.=17.208	S.D.=15.306	S.D.=10.752
Identity	33.950	38.6	38	30.75
	S.D.=16.279	S.D.=16.372	S.D.=16.355	S.D.=13.25
Self Satisfaction	48.3	50.65	49.2	46.65
	S.D.=12.749	S.D.=15.277	S.D.= 9.384	S.D.= 9.869
Behavior	36.6	40.95	39.65	37.25
	S.D.=12.185	S.D.=13.177	S.D.=12.128	S.D.=12.217
Phy. Self	34.8	35	39	33.1
	S.D.=18.165	S.D.=18.907	S.D.=13.211	S.D.=12.83
Eth. Self	32.65	38.050	34.8	35.25
	S.D.=12.563	S.D.=14.237	S.D.=13.305	S.D.=14.349
Per. Self	42.25	47.6	45.85	42.75
	S.D.=16.111	S.D.=14.325	S.D.=15.544	S.D.=11.135
Fam. Self	38.55	38.9	44.55	39.55
	S.D.=13.056	S.D.=18.032	S.D.=11.573	S.D.=14.413
Soc. Self	43.15	44.70	46.55	40.45
	S.D.=11.338	S.D.=16.743	S.D.=10.465	S.D.=12.947

Table 2

Summary ANOVA

Total Self Concept Score on Tennessee S-C Scale

Source	df	MS	f	p
Race (A)	1	183.01250	.4980517	NS
Feedback (B)	1	556.51249	1.5144978	NS
Sex (C)	1	32.51250	.0884797	NS
AB	1	227.81248	.6199708	NS
AC	1	485.11249	1.3201893	NS
BC	1	599.51250	1.6315184	NS
ABC	1	103.51248	.2816997	NS
Error (Within)	9			
Total	79			

Table 3

Mean Pre- and Post- Experimental Rating

of Ability to Memorize

	Positive				Negative			
	Black		White		Black		White	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Pre	6.8	6.0	7.0	6.1	6.3	6.0	6.1	6.2
Post	6.9	7.3	7.5	5.6	3.4	5.4	5.7	5.0

Table 4

Mean Percentile Estimated by Subjects

on Experimental Trials

	Positive				Negative			
	Black		White		Black		White	
Trials	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Baseline	58.3	52.4	56.3	56.3	50.4	44.9	57.3	56.4
Feedback	66.9	67.2	69.6	66.5	43.4	35.9	60.3	44.8
Post Feedback	63.8	64.0	61.6	60.7	39.5	37.5	52.7	46.1

Table 5

Summary Anacova of Estimations Feedback

with Baseline-Estimation as Covariate

Source	df	MS	F
Race (A)	1	184.90	1.58
Sex (B)	1	329.58	2.82
Feedback (C)	1	6872.37	58.89***
AxB	1	477.74	4.09*
AxC	1	153.59	1.32
BxC	1	461.21	3.95*
ABC	1	23.72	.20

*$p < .05$

***$p < .001$

Table 6

Post-Experimental Rating of Memory

with Pre-Experimental Rating as a Covariate

Source	df	MS	F
Race (A)	1	67.19	.257
Sex (B)	1	38.07	.146
Feedback (C)	1	7113.29	27.25***
AB	1	2973.86	11.39***
AC	1	1081.88	4.14*
BC	1	1072.964	4.11*
ABC	1	9.767	.04
Regression	1	28.81	.110
Within	69	261.07	

*$p < .05$

***$p < .001$

Table 7

Mean Percentile of Actual Performance

on Experimental Trials

	Positive				Negative			
	Black		White		Black		White	
Trials	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Baseline	50.6	48.9	48.9	49.9	49.7	55.1	47.1	49.3
Feed	50.8	50.2	50.4	50.3	49.0	53.3	47.5	48.7
Post	50.2	51.0	51.3	49.8	50.0	50.5	47.1	51.9

Table 8

Subject Rating of Experimenter on Seven-Point Scale

	Positive				Negative			
	Black		White		Black		White	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Friendly	6.4	6.5	5.6	5.7	5.3	6.2	4.8	4.7
Honest	6.5	6.3	5.4	5.5	5.3	5.9	5.1	4.8
Helpful	6.1	6.0	5.7	4.8	5.2	5.6	5.0	4.1
Good	5.6	6.0	5.4	5.4	5.1	5.9	4.7	4.6
Efficient	5.7	6.1	6.5	5.3	6.1	6.2	5.6	4.9
Facile	6.2	6.0	4.2	5.6	4.9	5.9	5.7	4.2
Sincere	5.7	6.5	6.0	5.5	5.7	6.2	5.7	4.9
Strong	5.7	6.3	4.7	5.1	4.2	5.5	5.3	4.3
Fair	5.5	6.4	5.0	5.5	4.8	5.8	5.1	3.8
Lenient	5.5	5.0	4.8	4.9	5.4	4.9	5.0	3.6
Truthful	5.2	6.0	5.3	6.4	5.5	5.7	4.5	3.4

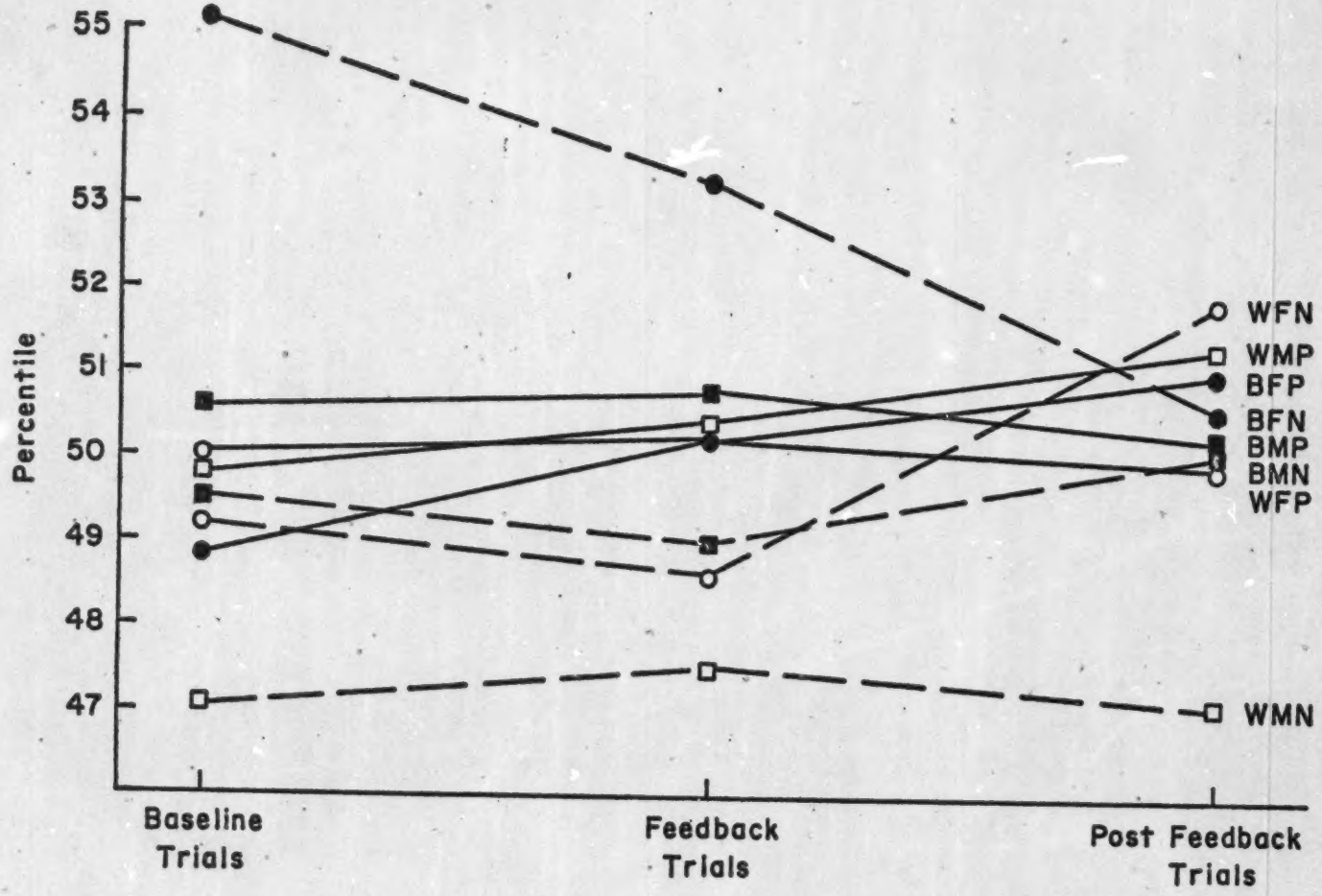

Fig. 3 Mean percentile of actual performance

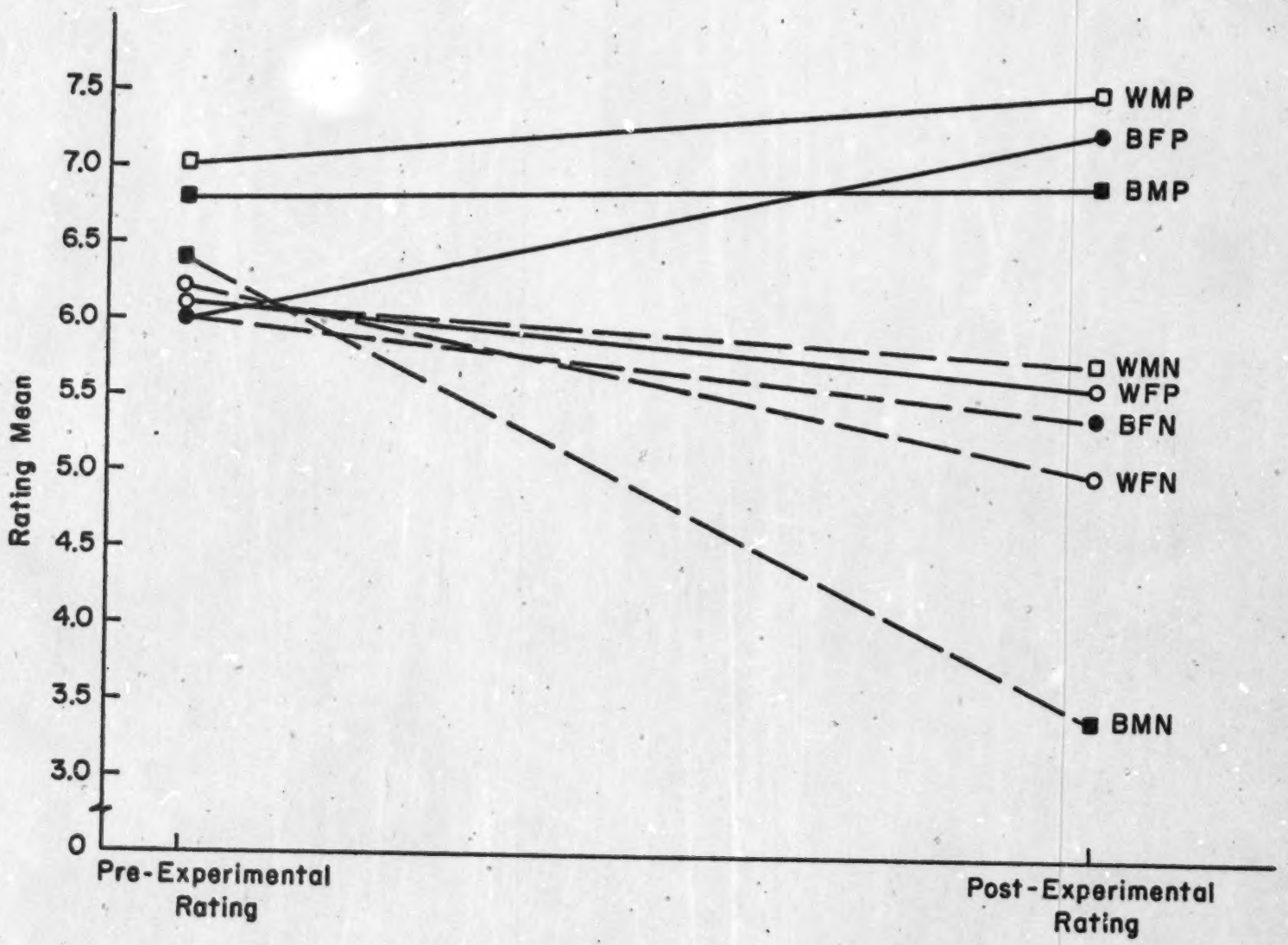

Fig. 2 Mean pre and post ratings of ability to memorize, using a scale from 1 to 10.

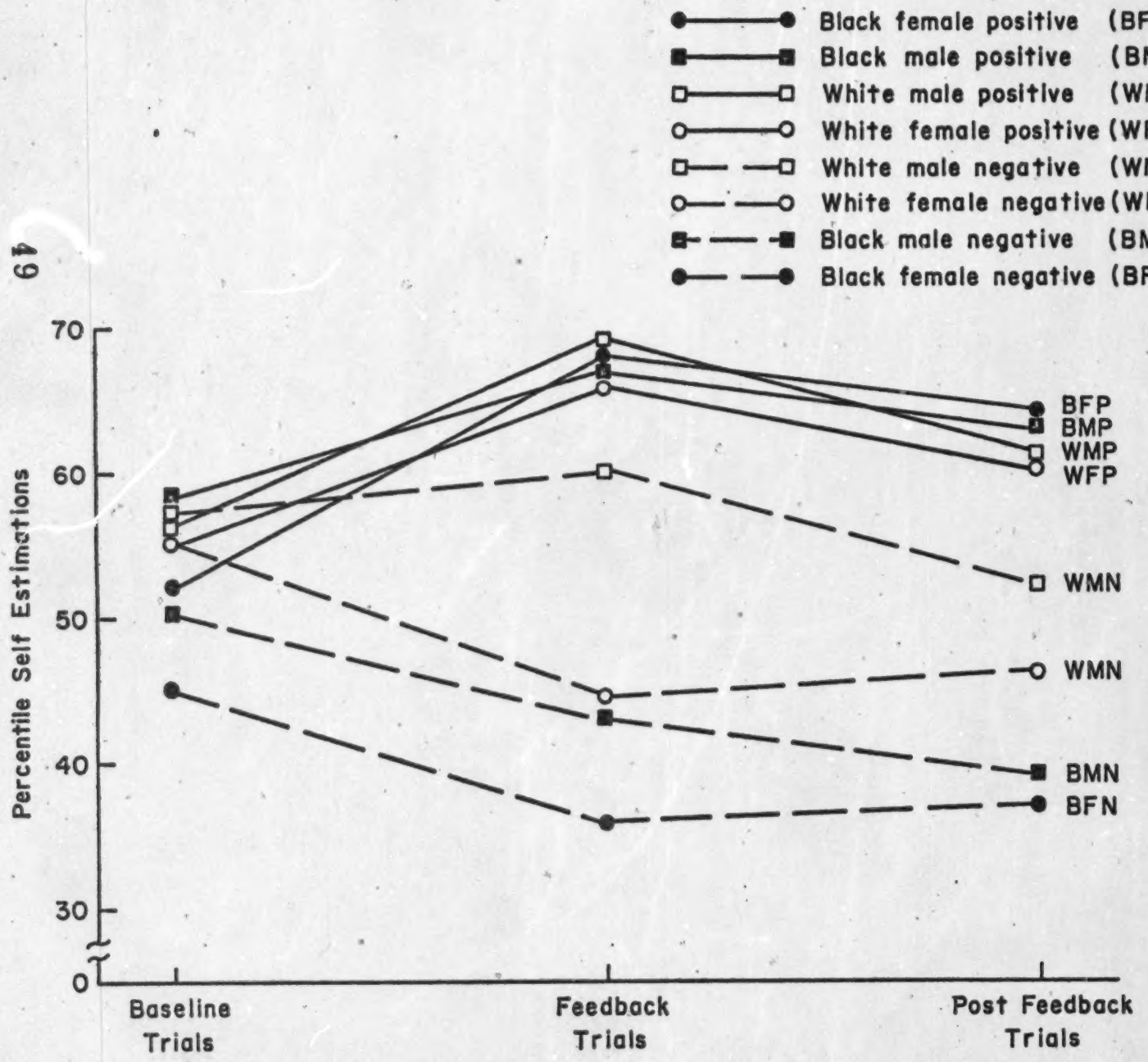

Fig.1 Mean estimation of performance for each group across experimental trials

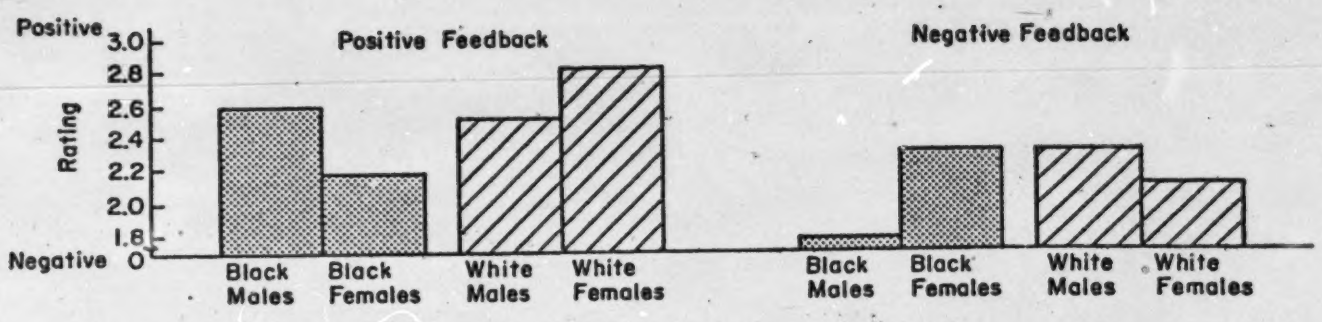

Fig. 4a Mean rating of emotional reaction to feedback on scale 1 to 3.

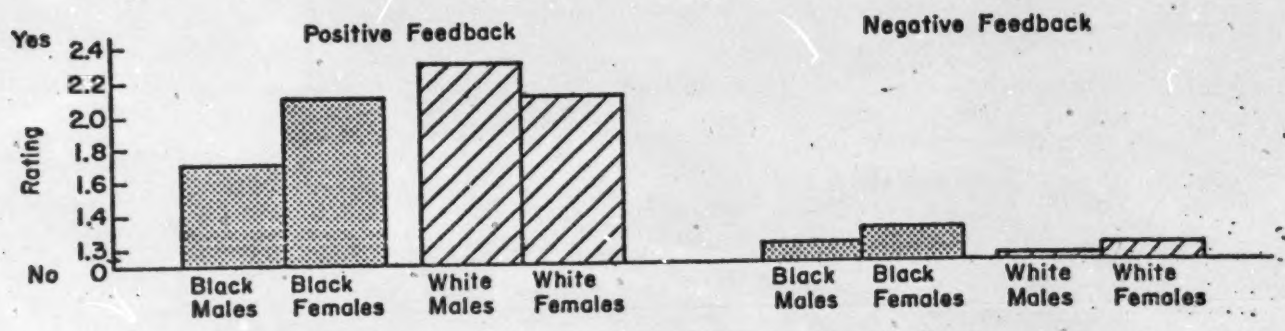

Fig. 4b Mean rating of representativeness of performance from 1 to 3.

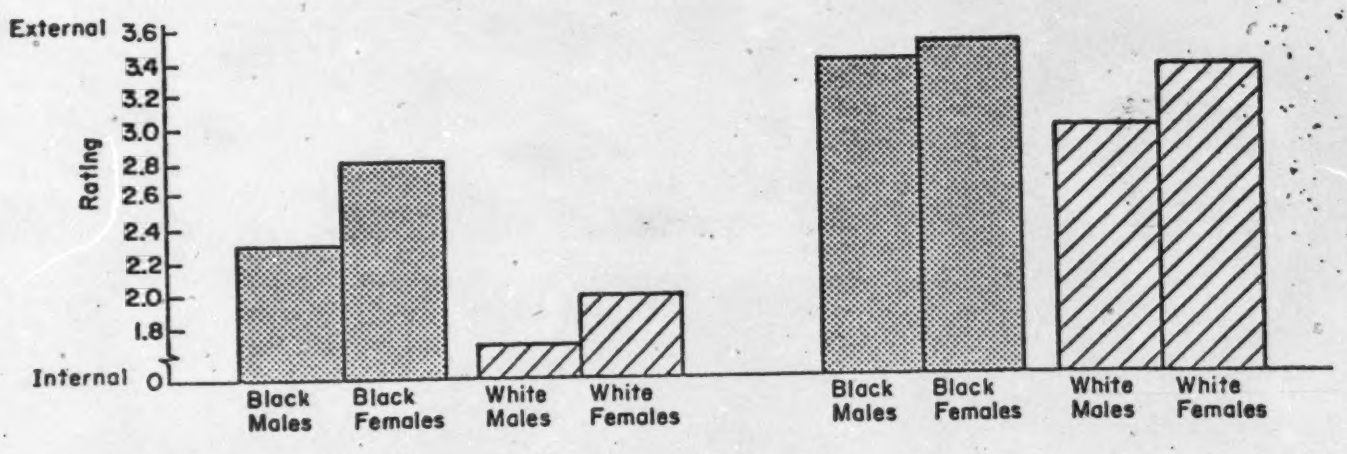

Fig. 4c Attribution of cause of performance.